

# HOW WE GOT OUR BIBLE

## The Ancient Manuscripts

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(Topic for week of March 19.)

**Text-book.** "How We Got Our Bible," by Rev. Dr. Smyth, 20 cents, postpaid. Send in your orders, and see that your Leagues are well supplied.

**Study pages** 19 to 29 of the Text-book.

**Consult also** "The Ancestry of our English Bible" (Pfeiffer) chapters 12 and 14.

**Suggested Scripture Lesson for Meeting—**  
Kings 22: 1-2; Psalm 1.

We begin our study of these ancient documents with the Greek manuscripts, because we have manuscripts in this language much older than the oldest known Hebrew manuscript of the Old Testament. In as far, therefore, as these Greek manuscripts contain parts of the Old Testament, they will belong to some version of the Old Testament, as its language was originally Hebrew.

The earliest Greek manuscripts at present known come from the fourth century A.D. (about three centuries after the writing of the books of the New Testament), and we have these manuscripts from this early time all the way down to the fifteenth century, when the art of printing was introduced. Their number is very great, running up into the thousands. They may be found in public and private libraries and collections in nearly all civilized countries. The most of them contain only parts of the New Testament, but some of the oldest, as we shall see, have parts of the Old Testament as well. They are divided according to the character of their writing into two classes:

- (1) *Uncials*, that is, those written in capital letters; and
- (2) *Cursives*, those written in a running hand. Under the latter are included most of the oldest manuscripts down to the ninth century, while the cursives were written from the ninth to the fifteenth centuries.

No manuscript before the ninth century bears a date. The question of determining the date of a manuscript is a difficult one, but there are certain characteristics about them which enable scholars to determine it, at least approximately. Some of the means of fixing the date are (1) the material on which a document is written, (2) the form of the letters, (3) the style of writing, (4) the presence or absence of punctuation marks, or of initial letters larger than the rest, and (4) the ornamentation—the later a manuscript is the more highly is it ornamented.

The oldest uncials are written on costly and durable vellum or parchment. The leaves are of about quarto or folio size, while the writing is arranged in two, three or four columns on each page. These manuscripts have usually no spaces between the words, no accents, and but few pausal marks, while there are no marks at all to indicate the ends of sentences. Certain familiar words are often abbreviated, the abbreviation being indicated by a line above the word. Words are sometimes written smaller as they approach the end of the line. All this was done to save space, for writing material was very expensive in those early days. At present only one hundred and twelve of these uncials are known, and of these only two contain the entire New Testament. The following in English letters will illustrate about the appearance of an early uncial manuscript (from John 1: 1-4).

INTHEBEGINNINGWASTHEWORD  
ANDTHEWORDWASWITHGOD  
ANDTHEWORDWASGOTTESAMEWAS  
INTHEBEGINNINGWITHGOD  
ALL  
THINGSWEREMADETHROUGH  
HIM  
ANDWITHOUTHIMWASNOTANY  
THINGMADETHATTHATBEEHMADE

The cursive manuscripts were produced from the ninth to the fifteenth centuries. They number several thousands, some 3,702 having been already catalogued by Nestle. Every great library possesses one or more of these. Some of them are of great value (viz., those copied from very early texts), but many are relatively unimportant. They were written in great numbers by the monks of the Middle Ages. Every monastery—and there were multitudes of them—had its scribes, whose business it was to copy the Scriptures. Only a small number of the many cursives that have been preserved have been closely studied, and their variant readings collated.

These cursives, being thus comparatively modern, are not so helpful in determining the original text as three or four very ancient uncials which have recently been discovered, and are now in different libraries of Europe. The story of the discovery of some of these manuscripts is as interesting as any tale of travel or adventure. Indeed, amongst the most fascinating of Biblical stories are those connected with the discovery, transmission and preservation of early manuscripts. Their production was sometimes a matter of imperial edict, as when Constantine the Great ordered from Eusebius, the famed historian and Bible scholar of the fourth century, for the churches of Constantinople, the preparation of fifty manuscripts of the Bible, to be written on artificially wrought skins by skillful calligraphers. The persecutions and wars of the Middle Ages destroyed such documents in large numbers. Fire, flood and fanaticism combined to wipe out these perishable treasures of Christendom. But some were sheltered in out-of-the-way fastnesses, in monasteries upon the mountain side, in the sacred precincts of carefully guarded churches, and in the palaces of kings. They were given as presents, they were borrowed, bought and stolen, their intrinsic value was almost always underestimated, and they were subjected to inexcusable risks of being hopelessly lost. Fortunately, however, there were some haunts unreachd by the demons of destruction, wherein these treasures were preserved. Large-hearted benefactors and long-lived Christian statesmen acquired many of these documents and deposited them where they are safe and can be available for scholars through all time."

We shall now look somewhat closely at three of these uncials which have been freely used in recent Bible revision but none of which were available in 1611 when our *Authorized Version* was prepared. These are: (1) the *Vatican*, (2) the *Sinaitic*, (3) the *Alexandrian*. Let us remember as we study these manuscripts that they are the *oldest copies of the Bible* (or part of the Bible) now known, having been written in the fourth century A.D. The *Vatican Manuscript* (Codex B). This is a manuscript of the Greek Bible now preserved in the Vatican Library at Rome. It was brought there by Pope Nicholas V. in 1448. Its real character and value remained unknown for centuries, because the Roman

authorities would not allow Protestant scholars to study it for any length of time. Several fruitless attempts were made. Dr. Tischendorf, one of the ablest of modern textual students, tried to consult it in the year 1845, but was permitted to look at it for only six hours. In 1845 Dr. Tragelias, another eminent scholar, also tried to study it. He tells how he was forbidden to copy a word. Before entering the room his pockets were searched, and all writing materials taken from him. If he became too intent on any passage the priests appointed to watch him would snatch the volume from him. In later years, however, the papal authorities became more liberally disposed, and in 1868 Tischendorf was allowed to study it, under supervision, for three hours a day. After some alterations with the authorities, he was able, the following year, to bring out an edition of the text. In 1868 it a very complete edition was published in Rome. The best edition of all, however, was the photographic facsimile of the entire work which was issued in 1889-90 by the order of Pope Pius IX. This edition made this most valuable manuscript accessible to all scholars, and facsimiles of it may now be seen in our chief public libraries.

"*Vaticanus*" was written in uncials on fine vellum, three columns to the page, 10 inches wide by 10½ inches high. The writing is plain and simple. There are no enlarged letters, no pauses, no divisions into chapters or sections. The characteristics have led scholars to date it somewhere in the fourth century. It originally contained the whole Greek Bible. After the ravages of time and use it now lacks Genesis 1: 1; 46: 28; Psalm 106:138; all of Hebrews, following chap. 9; of the Catholic Epistles, and the Apocalypse. This manuscript was largely used by Westcott and Hort in their revised text of the Greek New Testament.

2. *The Sinaitic Manuscript* (Codex A) was at one time in the monastery at the foot of Mt. Sinai, but is now in the Imperial Library at St. Petersburg. This manuscript is regarded as the greatest Biblical treasure of the Greek Church. The story of its discovery and acquisition by the celebrated German scholar Tischendorf is of fascinating interest. In the year 1844 he began a tour of the Orient, especially of its monasteries, in search of Biblical manuscripts, to the study and discovery of which he devoted his life. His quest brought him to the out-of-the-way monastery of St. Catharine at the foot of Mt. Sinai. The monks were graciously showing him their library, when, on glancing around he saw in what appeared to be a basket of waste paper a number of leaves, on which he observed some Greek inscriptions of a fascinating character. Then he had ever before seen. They proved to be parts of the famous Greek version of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint. There were forty-three leaves in all. These Tischendorf was allowed to take away with him, but was not given permission to see the remainder of the manuscript from which they had been taken. The librarian told him that two basketfuls of such leaves had already been used to kindle the fire. He foolishly told in monastic value, and then left for Europe where he deposited his precious sheets in the court library at Leipzig, Germany. These leaves contained parts of 1 Chronicles and Jeremiah, with Nehemiah and Esther complete. He published their contents in 1846, and, of course, produced a great sensation in the literary world. In 1853 he again visited the monastery, with the hope of getting the rest of the manuscript. But the monks were wary and he could get only one sheet containing eleven lines. This, however, was enough to whet his appetite, for these lines were